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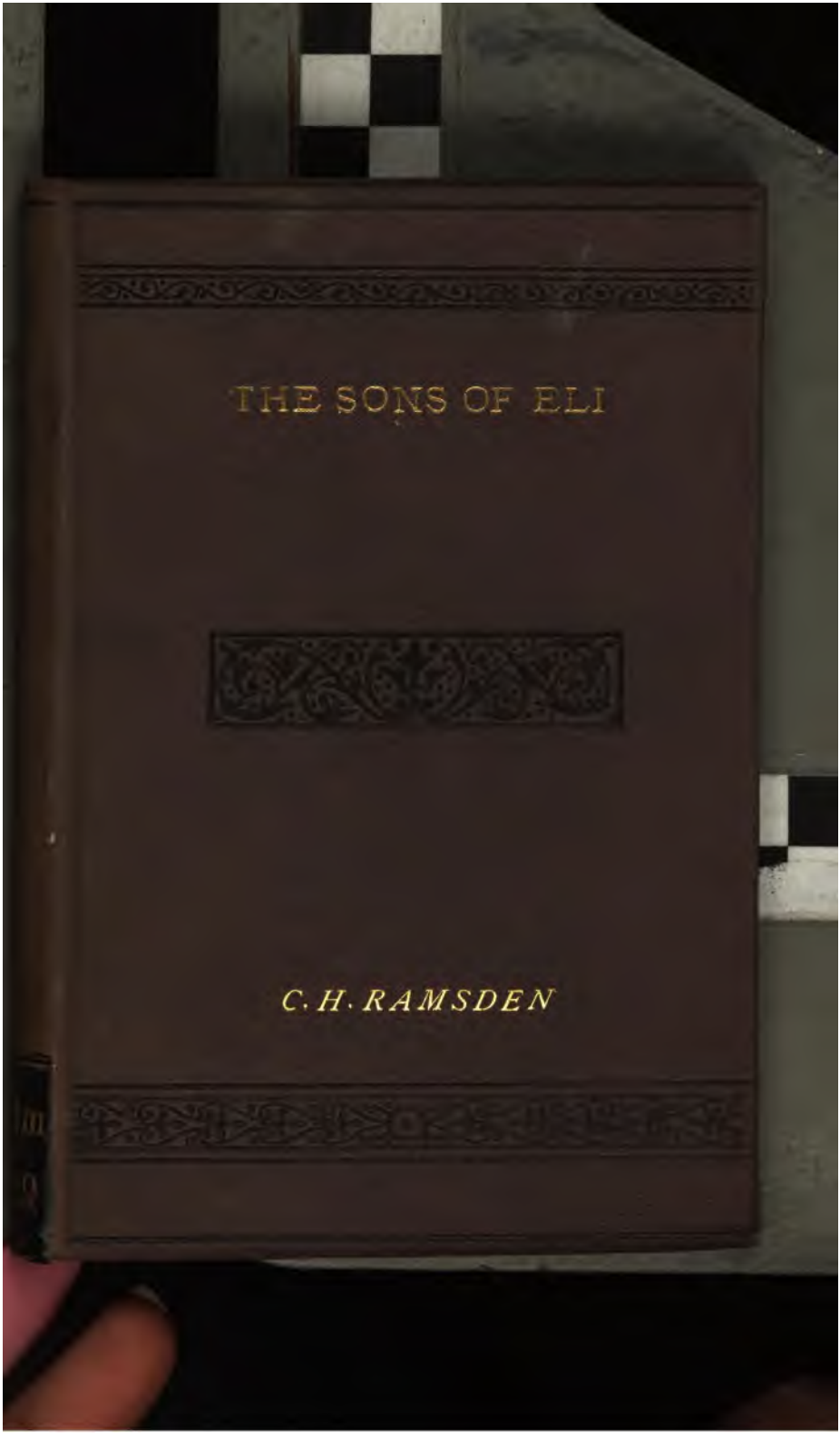
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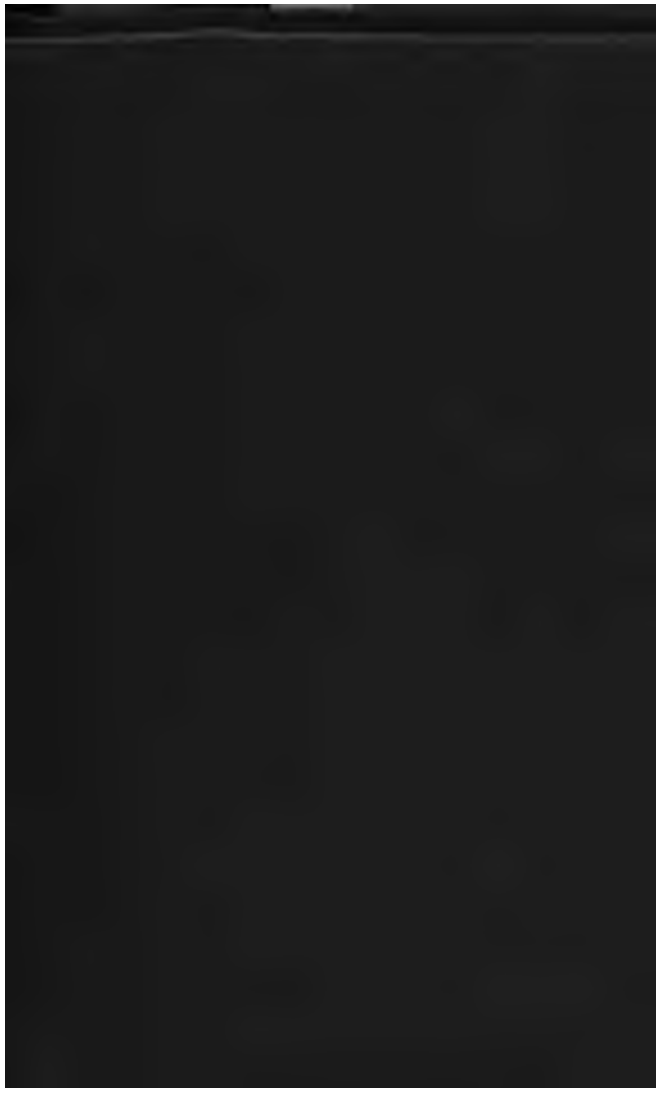
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THE SONS OF ELI
C. H. RAMSDEN









THE SONS OF ELI.

[redacted]

THE SONS OF ELI;

OR,

WORDS OF CAUTION, COUNSEL, AND ENCOURAGEMENT,

ADDRESSED TO THE

Children of Godly Parents.

BY THE

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LONDON:

HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY.

1877.

121. m. 579.

LONDON:
JOHN STRANGEWAYS, PRINTER,
Castle St. Leicester Sq.

PREFACE.

I DO not think it needful to say much in the way of preface to what follows. I have purposely kept in as small compass as possible what it would have been easy—much easier indeed—to expand. 'Goads' and 'nails' need not be large; but if the Chief Shepherd 'give' and bless them, by these some 'son may be admonished.' (Eccles. xii. 11, 12.)

Lest I should seem to use the language of fancy or exaggeration in speaking of sons of godly parents, who have become, like the sons of Eli, worse than faithless

ministers of God's sanctuary, let me say that I only speak of that which has come in great measure within the range of my own observation and experience.

I send forth this little book with the earnest prayer that God would forgive whatever in it is faulty, and bless both to writer and reader whatever is safe, and wise, and true.

CHILHAM, *Lent*, 1877.

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THE SONS OF ELI.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

IT is not my intention in these pages to dwell upon a certain portion of Israel's history, deeply interesting and instructive though it be, with a view to show how true, for the most part, is the saying, 'Like people, like priest;' how corruption never spreads faster than when it begins in God's own sanctuary; how the loftier the privileges enjoyed by any, the deeper —if they abuse those privileges—is their condemnation. Many a deeply solemn lesson of warning may be drawn from the *story of Eli* and his sons.

I wish, however, simply to make use of that story, as setting before us the case of a godly father associated with two utterly ungodly sons, and as reminding us therefore of the sad possibility of the children of truly religious parents walking in an evil way, and being separated at last by an impassable gulf from the authors of their being.

With all his faults and failings, no one, I suppose, would question for a moment old Eli's faith and devotion. It is true that when his sons made themselves vile, he 'frowned not upon them,' as he ought to have done, and that he is said to 'have honoured them above God, in allowing them to make themselves fat with the chiefest of the offerings of God's people Israel.' But for all that, there were in Eli's character and conduct unmistakable marks of a heart right with God, and filled with devout love of His service and *sanctuary.*

His gentle words of prayer on behalf of Hannah, when his harsh and hasty judgment of her as being drunken was proved to be mistaken—his mute acquiescence in God's will when wrath was denounced upon his wicked sons—his patient and fatherly dealing with young Samuel, and the reverential manner in which he bade the child to await the Lord's call—his lovely resignation when all the tale of woe which Samuel had heard was told him—and, most of all, his deep grief on account of the ark of God falling into heathen hands, grief far overtopping all that might be caused by personal and family troubles; these showed him to be a true servant of God, and leave us in no kind of doubt as to his present condition of peace and happiness. He sinned weakly, and suffered severely. His heart was broken before his neck. All that had gone before was bad *enough,* but when he heard of the ark,



rich with its mysterious treasures, and overhung by the Shechinah, which indicated that God was there; that ark before which, hidden by the veil from the gaze of other worshippers, the old high-priest had often stood trembling as the sacred incense fumed from his censer, when he heard of *this* being taken by a pagan host he could bear no more. The 'glory was departed from Israel,' and he sank down in grief and shame, but without a doubt to enter into his rest, leaving sin, and shame, and sorrow behind him for ever.

But if we are thus assured of the thorough devotedness of Eli, we cannot, with the widest possible stretch of charity, be less assured of the hopeless wickedness of his sons. 'The sin of the young men' is said to have been 'very great before the Lord, for (through them) men abhorred the offering of the Lord.' When their *father remonstrated* with them, they heark-

ened not unto him. No doubt, instead of remonstrating only, he ought at once to have thrust such vile offenders, whether his sons or no, out of the priesthood. Still his earnest, solemn words *ought* to have moved, and *would* have moved, hearts less hardened than those of Hophni and Phinehas. There is not the slightest sign in their history of repentance and amendment. 'They made themselves vile' (marg. 'accursed'), and were

'Cut off even in the blossom of their sin,'

'driven away in their wickedness,' and their names blotted out.

We have, as I need hardly remark, other instances in the Bible of ungodly children of godly parents. There are hints which lead us to hope well of the first sinners that ever trod our earth, Adam and Eve. Yet Cain, the first child born to them, is said to have been 'of that wicked

one,' and slew his brother. Amongst the little company saved in the ark, altogether unwarned by judgments witnessed and mercies received, was a wicked Ham, son of just and holy Noah. David had an Absalom, Josiah a Jehoahaz. It is needless, however, to multiply instances of a truth that none can question, a truth which our own sad experience confirms, that 'grace does not run in the blood;' that, as Bishop Hall has it, 'though goodness may be repaired in ourselves, yet it cannot be propagated to others.'

I have taken the case of Eli and his sons as furnishing one of the most striking and startling illustrations of the truth before us. And, starting from the acknowledged fact that godly parents cannot ensure godly children, I wish to give a few words of affectionate caution and counsel to those who, like myself, have enjoyed the inestimable blessing of a re-

ligious training, and have parents at rest in heaven, or journeying thither.

I do this the rather because it has seemed to me that whilst the children of godly parents enjoy special privileges, they are also exposed to some special dangers; and if by God's help and blessing I might be enabled to expose a snare, and awaken but one heedless wanderer to self-examination and repentance, it might save some parent's heart from the bitter disappointment of seeing, like Eli, all counsels and warnings given in vain.

Before, however, I come to speak of special dangers besetting the children of religious parents, let me dwell a little upon a brighter and happier part of the subject, and speak of the special advantages, blessings, and privileges of a truly Christian training. For the very last thing which I should wish to do in speaking of the position of such as I have in view is, to

undervalue their advantages, and to dwell so much upon the perils to which they are exposed, as to make it appear that a Christian training is a snare rather than a blessing. On the contrary, let us always thankfully maintain that those who have enjoyed such a training have had great things done for them, and that there needs but care, and pains, and prayer for the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to secure that those who have been thus trained shall arrive at a blessed immortality.

CHAPTER II.

SPECIAL ADVANTAGES: EARLY TRAINING.

'Train up (marg. "catechise") a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.'—PROV. xxii. 6.

ST. PAUL, writing to his dear son in the faith, Timothy, says, 'From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.' (2 Tim. iii. 15.) 'Unfeigned faith' had almost seemed to have come to him as a precious heir-loom passed down from his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, not, however, without much care and pains

bestowed by them upon his instruction in God's truth.

Before, however, I speak of the early training of the child of godly parents, let me go back a step or two in his history. Let us begin at the very beginning. It is in holy baptism that the child is first publicly, solemnly, prayerfully, dedicated to God, adopted into His family, enlisted into the ranks of Christ's army as His soldier and servant. I am not going to enter into the much-controverted question as to the exact nature and extent of the blessings bestowed in baptism. There is no need of it. For certainly all will admit that, in the case at least of the children of godly parents, baptism is an introduction into a state of peculiar privilege and responsibility. Surely in that holy ordinance the child is brought into a connexion with God unknown before, a special claim is *given him* upon the care and love and

pity of his heavenly Father, the promises of the Gospel are signed and sealed in his favour. There must be a deep and important meaning in the words of the Apostle Paul, where, speaking of an unbelieving husband being sanctified by the wife, and an unbelieving wife sanctified by the husband, he adds, 'else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.' (1 Cor. vii. 14.) I confess I have no sympathy with those Christian parents who think it right to deal with their children as if they were not God's children, until some strongly marked act of holy decision indicates a change within. Better surely, because truer, wiser, more hopeful, to address them from the very first as lambs of Christ's flock, children of His family, and to appeal to them on the ground of what they are, and ought to be, to live accordingly.*

* 'Viewed as a service of warm-hearted devotion, our baptismal office is full of elevating confidence in God

And can we doubt for a moment that the Spirit strives powerfully with those who are brought up in the blessed atmosphere of a Christian home? that He draws them to Christ? Have we not ourselves

and animating encouragement to Christian parents; and the only embarrassment we feel in the use of it is common to all Christian forms of devotion composed in faith, and hope, and love, viz. that our hearts are rarely so full of faith, and hope, and love, as cordially to keep pace with our words of prayer and praise, especially praise. From this embarrassment we can have no relief but in one of two ways—either by lowering the form to the unchristian state of our own hearts, or by raising our hearts to the Christian character of the form. It is a Christian thing to pray in faith, and hope, and love, asking the Holy Ghost for our children. It is a Christian thing to give thanks in faith, and hope, and love, though for the present we seem not to receive what we ask for. It is an unchristian thing to cease to pray for the blessing. It is an unchristian thing to pray without faith. It is an unchristian thing to pray with faith, and not to give thanks for having our prayers heard. "Sursum corda," "the virtue of prayer," is the holy oil which makes our baptismal service run sweetly, without either dogmatising *in falsehood on* the physical efficacy of the ordinance in

been conscious of such gracious strivings and drawings? And when our Saviour Christ says in His tender love, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not,' is there not something in the

itself, or recoiling in unbelief from the Christian fervour of the language employed in it.'—DEAN MCNEILE, *The Church and the Churches.*

'Baptism is a covenant by means of which man is brought into a condition of connexion with God. The blessings of that covenant are not conveyed mechanically, but are obtained from God's free grace by faith and prayer. And the full participation of mercies and privileges sealed and prospectively handed over is dependent on pains taken to claim and secure them. . . . We do not say that a man may not, like the prodigal, spend a splendid substance in riotous living, or like Esau, sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. But that does not prove that the substance is not at his command, or the birthright not legitimately his. It only proves that God calls and man refuses, that God provides and man neglects to claim, that God pledges and man looks indifferently on His graciousness. Still, throughout it all, the covenant lives on, signed, sealed, and delivered, if man had but faith to see it and energy to use it.'—DEAN BOYD, *On Baptism, &c.*

words which seems to imply that they *would* come if cold-hearted and faithless ones who ought to act very differently put no hindrances in their way? Yes, assuredly; to the young heart there is much that is attractive and alluring in the sweet story of a Saviour's love. And it is a wonderful and beautiful thing to see the simple faith with which a Christian child will receive what is told him of great and deep and awful mysteries which the wisest can never hope to fathom. There must be, there is, some strong, controlling influence (let us not doubt that it is the working of the Spirit of God Himself), which awes into reverent submission the inquisitive mind, and chains in modest silence the thoughtless tongue.

Now it is a very blessed thing to have from the very first the heart striven with, drawn, taught, guided by the Spirit of *God, a blessed* thing to have lessons of

sacred truth impressed upon it whilst it is yet tender, a blessed thing to have the love of Christ placed attractively in its view before the world with all its cares and vanities has come like a deadly blight upon every warm affection and every joyful hope. It is well surely that when 'the prince of this world cometh' he should find the heart at least to some extent preoccupied for God. It is true, seed sown in early years may often lie long dormant, yet is it not lost. 'Bread cast upon the waters' is often 'found after many days.' Texts, and hymns, and prayers, and lessons of truth and godliness, learnt at a mother's knee, often come back with softening power upon the mind of one wearied with sad experiences of the heartlessness of the world and the unprofitableness of sin.

Let us be thankful, then, deeply thankful, if we have in early days been taught and trained *in ways* of godliness. Let us bless

God if we have enjoyed, or still enjoy, the inestimable privilege of being under the care of parents of whom God could say as of faithful Abraham, 'I know them that they will command their children and their households after them, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment' (Gen. xviii. 19).

CHAPTER III.

SPECIAL ADVANTAGES: THE INFLUENCE OF A GOOD EXAMPLE.

'O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Thy people still are fed;
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led.

'Our vows, our prayers, we now present
Before Thy throne of grace;
God of our fathers! be the God
Of their succeeding race.'

IT is, as we have seen, a great and inestimable privilege to have been brought up from earliest infancy 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' But the wisest and holiest precepts will have little weight except they are supported by good example. Our

parents who have 'spoken unto us the word of life' will have effected little if they have not gone before us in the right way. Throughout these pages, however, I am assuming that such is the case. And when Christianity is not only *taught* with the lips, but *exemplified* in the life, how mighty is the influence for good brought to bear from day to day upon those who witness it! We have seen religion lived out before us besides having had it in words commended to us. If we have been taught to read the Bible, we have known as a fact that our parents have loved and studied that blessed book, and have 'esteemed it more than their necessary food;' if we have been taught to pray, we have been well aware that in the secresy of their own closets, and for themselves, and not only for us, they have held communion with God, pouring out the wants and troubles of their hearts before their Father

in heaven; if they have spoken to us of the blessed privilege of worshipping God in His house they have not only led us there, but have shown plainly enough that they have reckoned a day in the courts of the Lord better than a thousand. Daily, too, we have been called around the family altar. We have seen and known and been practically convinced of the fact that our dear parents dared not begin or end the day either in private or in the family without God. So they not only

'*Allured* to brighter worlds, but *led* the way.'

They told us of Christ and His love, and to them, to their own inmost hearts, He was, He is, 'the Chiefest amongst ten thousand, the altogether lovely.' Is it possible to over-estimate the blessing of having before our eyes 'living epistles of Christ known and read of all men?' of having close connexion and intercourse with those

who having 'tasted for themselves that the Lord is gracious,' could from practical experience say with David, 'Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him?' (Ps. xxxiv.)

CHAPTER IV.

SPECIAL ADVANTAGES: PARENTS' PRAYERS.

'Pray; though the gift you ask for
May never comfort your fears,
May never repay your pleading,
Yet pray, and with hopeful tears.
An answer, not that you long for,
But diviner, will come one day;
Your eyes are too dim to see it,
Yet strive, and wait, and pray.'

A. PROCTER.

IN all ages it has been as much from an impulse of natural affection, as from a sense of Christian duty, that parents who have themselves learnt to 'walk with God,' have pleaded earnestly for spiritual blessings on

behalf of their children. 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before Thee!' cried Abraham, the father of the faithful. Of Job we are told that he offered on behalf of his sons burnt-offerings according to the number of them all, saying, 'It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' David prayed on behalf of his son Solomon, 'Give (O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel) unto Solomon my son a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, thy testimonies, and thy statutes.' To come to our Lord's time, we have the case of the nobleman of Capernaum, who sought a cure for his sick child; of the Syrophœnician woman, who prayed that the devil might be cast out of her daughter; of the father who, imploring relief for his son tormented with an unclean spirit, cried out with tears in answer to our Lord's question as to his faith, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' Certainly, if St.

Paul would have 'intercessions made for all men,'—if he again and again entreated the prayers of his converts for himself and his fellow-labourers in the Gospel of Christ, we cannot doubt that he must have pressed continually upon those who were themselves 'partakers of the benefit,' the duty of praying for their children.

And who can tell what the children of Christian parents owe to prayers offered on their behalf by them? We have a lovely instance of the efficacy of a holy mother's prayer in the story of the great and good Augustine. When he was sunk deep in the mire of sensual indulgence, and filled with those sceptical doubts which are both the result and the refuge of a licentious life, his mother, the faithful Monica, never ceased to pray for him; as he says himself, 'Thy faithful one wept to Thee for me more than mothers weep the bodily death of their children, for she discovered

the death wherein I lay, and Thou despisedst not her tears when, streaming down, they watered the ground in every place where she prayed.'*

Years passed on, and still the prayer of that devoted mother seemed to receive no answer. At length, in her distress, she 'applied to a bishop, well esteemed in the Church as a man deeply versed in that knowledge which she thought might possibly be made instrumental in rescuing her son from the false philosophy and the heresies which possessed his mind. The bishop, as might be supposed, was occupied with weightier matters. Perhaps he thought the mother a little importunate, or that his own superior talents and attainments would be wasted upon a mere boy, puffed up with the novelty of captious questions. He consequently not only declined at that time to meddle in the matter himself, but advised

* Mrs. Ellis's *Mothers of Great Men.*

the mother to let her son alone, but still to pray to God for him, trusting that he would ere long perceive and renounce his errors. The mother *had* prayed; she *had* let her son alone; she *had* trusted. Was there then no help to be obtained from mortal man? She urged the bishop yet again; she could not be refused. Her entreaties were accompanied with many tears. Touched by the earnestness of her importunity the bishop at last exclaimed, "Go thy ways and God bless thee, for it is impossible that the son of these tears should perish;" which answer, though uttered with some little impatience the mother accepted as if it had been a voice from Heaven.'

At length the answer came; the change was wrought; the prodigal was brought home. And very shortly before the faithful mother died, she and her son, standing side by side, one in faith, one in hope, one in Christ, conversed with joy and rapture

about good things to come; and Monica said, 'Son, for mine own part, I have no further delight in anything in this life. What do I here any longer? To what end I am here I know not, now that my hopes in this world are accomplished. One thing there was for which I desired to linger awhile in this life, that I might see thee a true Christian before I died. My God hath now done this for me the more abundantly that I now see thee despising earthly happiness become His servant. What do I here?'

Of course, for any one to continue in sin, relying upon grace abounding in answer to a parent's prayers for deliverance from its consequences—to run recklessly into the very thick of temptation, and expect a father's or mother's intercession to extricate the tempted,—to turn his back upon heaven, and wait until God, having regard to the supplications of his parents on his

behalf, shall work the mighty miracle which shall arrest the transgressor, and set him on his face thither; all this is the very height of fanatical presumption and wretched self-deception. For every one of us must bear his own burden of personal responsibility. Every one of us must give account of himself to God. 'The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.' (Ezek. xviii. 20.) He who goes on in a course of wilful sin must not look to be saved in spite of himself, in virtue of his parents' prayers.

In such a case, however, let us not say and think that those prayers have been offered in vain. They have 'returned into the bosom' of those who offered them; they have brought peace into anxious and troubled hearts, the peace which comes from making known requests to God. Or the answer may have been in some measure found in the growing up of a soothing hope,

not proved to be groundless until the suppliant had entered into his, or her rest; having been 'taken away from the evil to come.' However this may be, faithful and earnest prayer must in some way bring down a blessing.

And the day alone shall declare all that we owe to our parents' prayers. Wise and pious friends raised up and sent to us in moments of need and danger—useful books placed in our way—plans and purposes so thwarted, guided, overruled, as that helps towards a Christian life have been almost unexpectedly provided — aye, and more than these, secret stirrings of conscience, and strivings of God's Spirit, coupled with solemn reminiscences of early teachings and troubles shared with parents, now perhaps at rest with God—in all these may be confidently traced answers to a father's, a mother's prayers.

And has not a thoughtless son or daugh-

ter sometimes, even amidst scenes of utter frivolity and sin, been recalled to seriousness by the thought, 'Just at this hour, I know well, my mother is wont to be alone with God in prayer, and I doubt not she is offering up prayers, and, it may be, shedding tears, for me?' We then, who have had, or still have, the inestimable blessing of prayers offered up again and again, fervently and faithfully, by those who gave us birth, have abundant cause to praise God for this amongst all His other mercies. And it should encourage us in praying for ourselves. For thus shall two or three be found agreeing together, touching that which they ask; the parents praying, 'Let the children of thy servants continue, and let their seed be established before Thee;' and their children praying for themselves, 'The Lord be with us, as He hath been with our father;' 'Save, O Lord, the son of Thine handmaid.'

CHAPTER V.

SPECIAL DANGERS.

'Bless'd eyes, which see the things we see!
And yet this tree of life hath proved
To many a soul a poison tree,
Beheld, and not beloved.

'So like an angel's is our bliss
(Oh! thought to comfort and appal)
It needs must bring, if used amiss
An angel's hopeless fall.'

Christian Year.

As there is no privilege without its connected responsibility, so there is no special blessing that has not some special danger in some way linked with it. That it is a special blessing to have godly parents, and *to have been* trained from the first days of

consciousness in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, none who view the matter at all rightly will venture to question.

At the same time it is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact that even such very training may, without watchful care and self-examination on the part of those so trained, be attended with much spiritual peril. For is it not plain that there is considerable risk of self-deception in the matter?

Because outward glaring sins have been escaped and avoided, there may grow up in the heart the comfortable notion (unsupported, however, by any real longing and striving after holiness) that sin itself is hated.

Because religious observances are kept up, and religious conversation joined in, the poor treacherous heart may deem itself religious.

Because there are now and then seasons of deep religious feeling, and meltings of heart when sweet hymns are sung, or vivid

descriptions given of heavenly blessedness, and fervent appeals made to the conscience, there may spring up a self-satisfied impression that the affections are set on things above, and that Christ is truly loved and honoured.

Now as to dangers arising from such sources as these, let it be remembered that mere acquiescence in the truths and observances of religion, is not religion itself. Mere contact with godliness does not make any one godly. To live in a Christian atmosphere does not necessarily Christianize the heart and life. To be kept by God's good Providence and home restrictions from open profligacy, does not (as the experience of thousands, alas! can testify) secure any one from secret sins, and a life of sinful sloth and self-indulgence; no, nor from a lurking distaste for the religious life around him.

Nor, again, is a religion of sentiment

enough. Fits of religiousness are not religion. Warm feelings, tears shed over glowing descriptions of heaven, even occasional wishes to be like some of those whose holy lives and deaths we read, these are not enough. Did not wicked Balaam breathe the pious wish, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his?'

Let it never be forgotten that religion is a deep, real, personal thing. It is not something taken *upon* us from without, but growing up *in* us from within. It must be measured and tested by its fruits. What are they? Secret communion with God in prayer; self-denial; efforts to do good, and to lead others to Christ, to make their present condition more happy and their future prospects more hopeful; longings after the purity and holiness, and not only after the happiness of heaven. If all the religion which we have is only such as clings to us

from connexion with godly parents, and from being brought up amidst the hallowed surroundings of a Christian home; if we are satisfied with not *opposing* what is good, as though this were the same as for our own selves embracing, loving, practising it, surely we run a fearful risk of deceiving ourselves and thinking ourselves safe whilst on the brink of ruin.

But there may be a danger of a very different kind connected more or less with a Christian training. Sometimes parents, in their earnest desires to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord, exercise undue restraint. Perhaps there is a want of proper allowance for youthful buoyancy, some over-strictness, and over-scrupulous rigour as to prohibiting things not absolutely unlawful. And too often the result of all this is a sad reaction when parental supervision can be no longer carried on, and parental authority no more exercised.

The boy or girl long restrained breaks out as a young man or woman into all the more intense worldliness if not into avowed ungodliness. We have, I suppose, all seen with grief, children of godly parents guarded, trained, taught, kept back from what was evil or even questionable, with the most scrupulous care, launching out into extremes of self-indulgence and sin, and setting utterly at naught the holy lessons of their childhood. If this be the case with any who read these pages, let them not think for a moment that ill-judged restraint on the part of their parents (if indeed it were so) excuses a life of carelessness and sin in them. If there was an error in the early training it was surely in a right direction. Better to have been over-strict than to have been slothfully heedless whether the child went in the broad way or the narrow. Love alone, over-anxious love, warped the judgment. And it is indeed a

cruel and thankless thing to make a parent's excess of care an excuse for rendering all that care fruitless, to repay years of watchfulness with bitter disappointment.

Again, the best are at their best encompassed with infirmity, and even a truly godly father or mother may sometimes be guilty of inconsistencies of conduct marring the beauty of a Christian life. There may be little outbreaks of temper, hasty speeches, a want of patience and gentleness, or some other of those failings which make a jar in the machinery of the household life. And the tempter who catches eagerly at everything which serves his purpose may suggest, 'See how little religion does for its professors,—all is hollow and unreal,—take your chance and live as you please.' Now if any of us are tempted thus, let us remember that whilst we see the little flaws and failings of those around us, our parents and friends,

we know nothing of their inward struggles, of many a moment of penitential prayer and of deep humiliation before God, nothing (or little at most) of their fervent intercessions on our behalf. We see the outside, but cannot read what is within. 'There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.' Still there is a real, a deep, a lasting difference (and one which all shall discern one day) between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. Man's inconsistencies do not make the truth of God of none effect. After all, it is all real, all true. Our parents who have taught us of Christ and His love, have not believed, and spoken, and served God in vain.

Yet once more: as I write, there come up before my mind instances of those who, early trained in ways of godliness, have plunged as life advanced into lowest depths of ungodliness and depravity.

There was a time when conscience was tender, and feelings were warm, and there was a respect for religion, if nothing more; and if in those early days there could have been put before them an exact picture of what they are now—perhaps slaves of intemperance, or living in known sin; mixing with the impure and profane; shunning the light, because their deeds are evil; forsaking God's house, and wasting in folly and sin God's holy day; with minds and consciences defiled and bodies enervated by sinful indulgence — they would have exclaimed with Hazael, 'But what, is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' Alas! in a downhill course, he of necessity runs the fastest who has started from the highest point. He who has been most carefully taught and trained in his youth is likely to become, if the lessons of his youth are despised and forgotten, the most hardened

transgressor. The Psalmist says, 'Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law.' If it pains a holy heart to see sin anywhere, oh, how doubly painful is it to see one who has come out of a godly home walking after his own ungodly lusts—'filled with all unrighteousness,' and breathing out oaths with the most profane—having reached that awful pitch of wickedness in which a man not only does evil things, but takes pleasure in them that do them! (Rom. i. 32.)

Could I hope to catch for a moment the attention of one such reckless wanderer from the path in which he was early taught to walk, I would say to him with all earnestness and affection, 'Remember, my brother, you are not, and never can be, in the position of one who has never "known the way of righteousness;" you can never plead as an excuse for any sin, "I did it ignorantly in unbelief." "To

whom much is given, of them much shall be required." It may suit you to forget the holy lessons of your childhood, but they are not forgotten by Him who will call you to an account for the things done in the body.' We have often heard of those who have been rescued, almost at the last gasp, from death by drowning, declaring that in what seemed to them their last moments, memory reproduced, lit up as it were, by a sudden flash, a faithful picture of long-forgotten warnings, privileges, and sins. So, be sure, on a hopeless death-bed, or in the awful silence which shall hold enchained those who await the Judge's last sentence, there will come up before the shame-stricken mind the warnings, privileges, hopes, and blessings of early days. And then will be seen and felt the madness and folly of those empty sayings by which ungodly sinners have tried to cheat themselves and others

into the belief that sin was a trifle, and death, which God declares to be its wages, an idle dream.

Turn, then, O turn, my brother, before it be too late. We read of a very wicked son of a very holy father—Manasseh, the son of good king Hezekiah—who went deep and far in sin, and yet was through divine mercy rescued, and brought, after sore afflictions, to repentance. True, Manasseh, so long the cruel oppressor of his people, and their leader in idolatry and licentiousness, could never quite undo, when he had repented and turned to God, the evil he had done. He could never unlearn his people the wickedness which he had taught them. His own son imitated his crimes, and never imitated his repentance. You too (and it is a sad and humbling thought) can never restore innocence which you have been the means of destroying, nor soften hearts which you

have helped to harden. There are some, it may be, gone already to their last account for whose spiritual ruin you are in great measure responsible. But oh, do not go on filling up your cup of guilt to the very brim. Do not go on 'making yourself vile.' Manasseh sought and found forgiveness, and why not you? Hezekiah was taken to his rest when Manasseh was but twelve years old; and when he left his boy behind, no doubt he hoped that he would follow in his steps. Little did the good old king know how that boy would turn out, and that through him such evil would come on Judah and Jerusalem as should make the ears of every one that heard of it to tingle. In like manner God may have taken away a godly father or mother before they could see in you the heart-breaking sight of a Christianly-trained son taking part with the sons of Belial. But will you be content with this? with

knowing that there beats no more on earth a father's or a mother's heart for you to break? There is a Heart which yearns over you,—the Heart of Him who wept and bled for sinners; let Him no longer call and plead in vain. Break loose at once and for ever from your evil companions. 'Take with you words and turn unto the Lord, say unto Him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously;' 'With Him there is mercy, and with Him plenteous redemption;' and 'in Him the fatherless findeth mercy, and the penitent backslider health and restoration.'

CHAPTER VI.

SPECIAL DANGERS: THE PRIEST'S OFFICE PROFANED.

'Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.'—1 SAM. ii. 17.

'Cold whilst he kindled others' love.'
Christian Year.

TWO considerations make me pause and hesitate as I enter upon this portion of my little treatise. First, I cannot but feel from the very circumstances of the case that those for whose benefit (if God so will it) I just now write are perhaps the least likely of all to read my words. And, secondly, the words of the Apostle Paul come forcibly home to me, 'Thou that

judgest another judgest thou not thine own self?' and I fear lest whilst I seem to condemn others I may be passing a sentence of bitter condemnation upon myself.

Yet as to the first of these difficulties, it may be that in some solitary hour, in moments of remorse, in a time of prostration on a sick bed, God's Providence may put these pages in the way of some wanderer, and even such a poor shaft as I can send forth, shot at a venture, may reach its mark and do its work of conviction. And as to the second ground of hesitation, if it be, as I would humbly hope, at Divine suggestion that I seek to warn a brother in privilege and responsibility, I must not be deterred by a crushing sense of personal short-comings, but rather crying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation!' strive that 'having preached to others I may not be myself a castaway.'

I need not say much of the history of the sons of Eli as it is connected with God's house and services. Their avarice, their licentiousness, their shameless disregard of God's honour and the rights and feelings of the worshippers, made the services of the tabernacle hateful to the people who came to take part in them. They who should have been the leaders in devotion, foremost in prayer and praise and holy adoration, were the very men who turned God's house into a den of thieves.

Now it is in fulfilment of long-cherished hopes and desires that many a son of godly parents enters into the ministry of Christ's Church. They have counted it an honour to serve God, and a privilege and duty, to try to win souls for Christ, and therefore very naturally, like Hannah of old, have dedicated in thought one child or another to God's service, saying, like the pious Jewish

matron, 'I have lent him to the Lord as long as he lives.'

As years passed on the parents' wish has been acquiesced in. Perhaps it has for some time been taken for granted that such and such a son should be a clergyman; perhaps no other profession has been thought of and offered, or perhaps earthly considerations may have been mixed with higher motives. Be it as it may, the result has been that, as a matter of course rather than in consequence of his own solemn and prayerful choice, many a son of godly parents finds himself intrusted with the care of souls as a minister of Christ.

Does it follow that admission into a holy office makes him who is so admitted holy? Alas! we cannot say so with the story of Eli's sons before us. We know too well that the tendency of familiarity with holy things and constant repetition of holy words, whilst the heart goes after sin, is

to harden and deaden. In the case of Eli's sons it was not only that their high position as God's priests made their sin more conspicuous, but also that they became more and more hardened in it by their hypocritical participation in the most sacred rites and services. I have already said that he runs downhill the fastest who starts from the highest point; similarly his fall is the most ruinous who sinks down from the loftiest position of honour and responsibility. If the son of many prayers, ordained as a minister of the gospel of Christ, proves a mere hireling, a cold-hearted formalist, the reaction is fearful indeed. Either he sinks into 'recklessness of unclean living,' or he forces himself to go mechanically through forms and observances which are hateful to him, or he will not, dare not think, or else,

'Christian in name but infidel in heart,'

he makes up his mind that religion is all a sham, but for his livelihood he must, like many more, act his part in it. And so he works on in chains, or else tries to drown thought in idle mirth, though often sore at heart within: persuading himself that a high standard of spiritual religion is a thing so utterly beyond reach that it is useless to aim at it, and that he must content himself with what will pass muster amongst men, whilst conscious of unfaithfulness to his God.

And what as to the future? For early religious training cannot be so far forgotten as to leave *no* anxious thought at any time about what is to come. It may be that some secret questionings are admitted as to the exact truth and fulfilment of Bible denunciations, or there may be a loose reliance upon God's boundless mercy, or a soothing thought of some future day of repentance and recovery, or (as I intimated

before in some rare cases) some dependence upon the restoring grace which may be given in answer to his parents' prayers, or possibly nothing more than a vague unsifted notion that somehow all will come right at the last. To refuges of lies such as these perhaps will the poor soul betake itself when conscience is more than commonly troublesome.

But how terrible at last will be the scattering of all such false hopes! For it will not avail to plead at the last, 'It was not altogether of my own choice that I entered the Christian ministry; I had scarcely any option in the matter; I simply acquiesced in the wishes of others.' There is weighty truth in the words of St. Chrysostom, 'Not only those who aspire to an important station, but those who come to it through the solicitation of others, are deprived of all excuse for their errors. For if they who were appointed to the office by God after

often declining it, were subjected to such severity; if nothing could screen either Aaron or Eli, or even that blessed saint, prophet, and hero, the meekest of all men upon the earth, who talked with God as a friend, it will be of little avail for me who am so far below his pitch of virtue to plead that I am conscious of never having sought the office, especially under the present management of our ordinations, which are in too many instances determined not by Divine grace, but by human contention.' (St. Chrysostom on the *Priesthood.*)

'What shall I say, then, to one who is perhaps a true son of Eli, the ungodly offspring of a godly priest, or if not that, at least the son of one who has been a priest in his own household? What shall I say to thee, my brother, who, thus taught and trained, carriest thine ungodliness into the very temple of the Lord of hosts? It

scarcely becomes a fellow-sinner to dwell upon

> 'the prophet's awful doom
> Who speaks and will not hear.'

Surely a still small voice within must have whispered often of that.

Rather by the sweet memory of prayers lisped at a mother's knee, of holy counsels given by a father now perhaps at rest with Christ, of happy Sundays when all seemed bright and hopeful without and within, let me plead with thee to drop at once and for ever this miserable and but half-successful self-deception. Get thee to thy God, thy father's God, right humbly, and ask that prayers long offered for thee may obtain at last a gracious answer. I do not say, give up thy sacred office: no, rather try to make it a blessed reality. Out of the very depths of shame and fear and sorrow cast a look of faith at the cross of

Christ. In the fountain opened for sin and all uncleanness, even the blackest and vilest, 'wash and be clean.' The great Chief Shepherd is full of pity even for under-shepherds who have long been false and faithless.

Thine own lips utter of necessity from time to time holy words of prayer. Try to put thy heart into them. It is thy very work and office to preach the Gospel to others. Perhaps, conscious of guilt within, thou hast kept back much of God's truth; now, however, speak it out boldly, and grasp for thine own self the blessings which thou art commissioned to offer to others. It may not, it will not, be easy at once to reverse years of formal, heartless ministrations, task-work services, and coldly uttered or even distorted Scripture truths. But the Spirit of God is strong, and can perfect His strength in human weakness. And the simplest truth spoken by stammer-

ing lips, if only prompted by a contrite heart, is better far for thyself and others than well-arranged words to which nothing within responds. O son of a holy father, do not be content to 'die amongst the unclean,' turning, or at least keeping, from Christ those whom it is thy special business to lead to Him! Rather now at length take such 'good heed to thyself and to thy doctrine,' that thou mayest both 'save thyself and those that hear thee,' and justify the decision which selected for the work of thy life the high and honourable office of an ambassador for Christ.

And if through God's good mercy we have been kept back from such sins as have caused men to 'abhor the offering of the Lord,' and to speak scornfully of His ordinances, let us think, my brothers in the ministry, of the high vantage-ground on which we stand as the sons of true servants of the Lord of hosts. With many a fervent

prayer they taught and trained us, in prayer they dedicated us to the service of the sanctuary, and sent us forth to preach that which they so much loved and prized themselves, the gospel of the grace of God. They have followed us in our Sunday and weekday ministrations with continual prayer, they watch (if still spared to us) with loving anxiety our course. We have had much in our favour, much to help and cheer us. Let us be thankful and hopeful. For such as we are 'boasting' is utterly 'excluded;' but despondency can only be the fruit of a sinful unbelief. Why should we not say of the Lord with the grateful Psalmist, 'He is my God and I will praise Him, my father's God, and I will exalt Him?'

Or if sometimes a sad conviction comes over us that we have but narrowly escaped such guilt as we have been contemplating, still with unfaltering hope let us pray,

'When foemen watch our tents at night,
And mists hang wide o'er moor and fell,
Spirit of counsel and of might,
Our pastoral warfare guide Thou well.

'And O! when worn and tired we sigh
With that more fearful war within,
When passion's storms are loud and high,
And brooding o'er remembered sin

'The heart dies down,—O mightiest then
Come ever true, come ever near,
And wake our slumbering love again,
Spirit of God's most holy fear!'

Christian Year.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUDING WORDS: OF COUNSEL AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves.'—2 COR. xiii. 5.

'My boast is not that I derive my birth
From loins enthroned and rulers of the earth;
But higher far my proud pretensions rise,
The son of parents passed into the skies.'

COWPER.

I HAVE spoken a little of the special advantages and privileges which seem to me to be the lot of the children of godly parents. I have touched also upon some of the special dangers to which they are all in common exposed, but above all, those of them who at the wish of pious parents,

or otherwise, have entered the ministry of Christ's Church.

And now let me venture to add, in conclusion, a few words of plain, practical counsel and encouragement. Obviously the first great duty resulting from what we have been considering is that pressed upon the Corinthians by the Apostle Paul in the words quoted above; I mean the duty of *self-examination.* We must take nothing for granted in matters which have to do with our soul's safety. We must not try to mystify ourselves into a sort of belief that, somehow or other, the godliness of our parents shall be placed to our account.

Yet when we would ascertain our true state before God, we must not always (nor even often) take as the test of it warm feelings, and devout aspirations, still less good wishes and intentions. In matters which have to do with bodily health it is not a good thing for us to examine too

minutely into every little symptom of healthiness or the reverse,—to pore and ponder over every possible ailment—to question closely the state of nerves, and heart, and brain. So doing many become mere useless, melancholy hypochondriacs. Is there appetite? Is there strength for reasonable exercise? Is there sleep? If so, this is enough; we may go and eat our bread and do our work with a thankful, cheerful heart. And so in spiritual matters. It will not be of much service to us to be often anatomizing our feelings, trying to work ourselves up to what we think a proper pitch of devotion, comparing ourselves with ourselves, and dwelling much upon what we felt once and what we feel now. Such an exercise is not often profitable. Time, and thought, and feeling, are often thus wasted in an introspection which ends, it may be, in morbid sentiment or listless despondency. It is because this

is so, that diaries which record minutely feelings varying from day to day, are in so many instances profitless or even misleading.* I do not say there should be no scrutiny as to feelings, motives, affections, desires; but that it is far from being

* 'What so utterly empty and unprofitable as religious diaries, experience records, chronicles of past states of mind, unless indeed traced by a master hand, and laid down with rare and self-denying faithfulness? Often we find in such records, often we find in ourselves, a disposition to exaggerate our own sinfulness. All is put down as bad; nothing could be worse. Slight errors are magnified into great sins, real sins blackened into unpardonable offences. "O meekness!" we may disposed to say; "O humility!" But pause a moment, and inquire, Is this really so? When self is both the accuser and the accused, both the prisoner and the prosecutor; when, again, the crime charged is past, and the act of charging it present; when all the discredit is looked upon as belonging to former and infirm self, and all the credit as accruing to a present better self; O how strong is the temptation to get at the comfortable inference, "I was worse then, but I am better now." How the treacherous self-gratulation mingles even with humility—even with thankfulness to God!'—DEAN ALFORD, *Sermons on Christian Doctrine.*

enough to regard these alone. With the consideration of these should be always coupled some practical inquiry as to what is done, what sacrificed, what borne for Christ and His members. And instead of idle and melancholy musings, it is better, safer, wiser by far, to go at once to the duty that lies close at hand, or to do the simplest, humblest act of Christian love and charity. Often in the act of obedience there grows up a greater readiness to obey; by the act of charity the grace of charity is confirmed. And we shall most safely arrive at a happy conclusion as to our state and prospects, when, as appetite, strength for labour, and rest indicate bodily health; so hungering and thirsting after righteousness, activity in God's work, and quiet waiting upon God, give evidence of Divine grace operating within.

Further, we need not be very solicitous to discover exactly the date and means of

our conversion to God. There is much truth in those words of old Thomas Fuller: 'God invites many with His golden sceptre, whom He never bruises with His rod of iron. Many, neither in their conversion, nor in the sequel of their lives have ever felt pain in such a manner and measure as amounts to a wounded conscience. Such (for instance) who never were notoriously profane, and have had the benefit of godly education from pious parents. . . . Such children, whose parents have been citizens of New Jerusalem, and have been bred in the mystery of godliness, oftentimes are entered into religion without any spirit of bondage seizing upon them,—a great benefit and rare blessing when God in His goodness is pleased to bestow it.' It is not easy, it certainly is not necessary, in the case of children religiously brought up to date exactly the first turning of the heart to God. It is

easy with the Bible in our hands, and after help sought in humble prayer from Him to whom all secrets are known, to tell if the heart *is* so turned. And this is the really important point. We need not disturb ourselves with anxious inquiries as to the time and manner of doing the great work of conversion, provided that we have scriptural evidence that it is done.

Suffer, my dear brothers and sisters, yet one or two more words of exhortation.

Do not wait to do '*some great thing*' before you attempt *anything* for the glory of God and the welfare of your fellow-creatures. Do not be evermore *looking forward*, and fixing upon some *distant* day as the date when you will really begin to live a useful life. Do not venture to regard yourselves as exceptions to general rules, as having peculiarities of temper and disposition which render needless for you precautions taken by others. Do not talk

much of being 'misunderstood,' of having propensities which it is hard, if not impossible, to control, of being subjected to temptations unknown by most. All such notions are only traps and snares laid for our feet by the great enemy of souls. Depend upon it, you are not so different as you would fain suppose. 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.' (1 Cor. x. 13.) 'As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.' (Prov. xxvii. 19.) He who 'from the place of his habitation looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth, fashioneth their hearts alike.' (Ps. xxxiii. 14, 15.) You are exposed to the same dangers as have beset Christians in all ages, you need their helps, you have offered to you the grace which kept them safe and made them victorious.

Do not, again, think that you may safely disregard means of grace, and be negligent

in attendance at the Lord's house and the Lord's table. You were early taught to read the Bible ; do not, when it rests entirely with yourselves to take it up or not, let it be day by day unread or hastily glanced at. Try to find for yourselves in that blessed book the sweetness of which your parents have so often spoken. You were early taught to pray, do not give up prayer or be slack in it now that simple petitions are no longer suggested to you at a mother's knee. You have been led again and again to the house of the Lord, do not think it a matter of indifference whether you go there, or suffer Sundays to slip by unblest by a single act of public worship. And as to the Holy Communion, most earnestly would I counsel you not to disobey the Lord's bidding by absenting yourselves from that sacred feast. If you do, be sure of it, you will soon feel yourselves released from any obligation to live a truly Christ-

ian life, you will, unconsciously perhaps, give yourselves license to be careless and thoughtless, you will become ashamed of Christ and His words. And how can faith and love be kept in warm and active exercise so effectually as by a believing contemplation of Christ crucified, and a 'feeding on Him by faith with thanksgiving,' in that holy sacrament? Moreover, if (as may well be the case) one or both of your parents have entered into their rest, it is good and wholesome to think of them when we 'bless God for those who are departed this life in His faith and fear.' They are beyond the need of our prayers, but they are fit subjects for our praises. And whilst we thank God for *them*, we may most properly pray for *ourselves*, that we may have 'grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of His heavenly kingdom.'

Do not, let me further say, despise *little*

duties, or allow (what seem to be) *little sins*. There is a true though homely saying, 'A straw will show which way the wind blows.' This is true in spiritual things as well as natural; and specially so perhaps where wholesome restraint enforces more or less of outward propriety. Little acts of unselfish courtesy, kindness, gentleness, and consideration, will show self more or less subdued, and the grace of God influencing the heart. On the other hand, little outbreaks of temper, fits of sulkiness and discontent, peevish fretfulness, harsh and hasty speeches, stirrings of envy, jealousy, and pride, these will bring into question the fairest Christian profession, and tell a sad tale as to the state of the heart within. All the more that gross sins are abstained from, should these indications of your spiritual condition be watched. The children of a godly home should keep up its happy, hallowed character, and dif-

fuse a sweet savour of peace and love around. Try then to think of others, and not only of yourselves. 'Even Christ pleased not himself,' try, like Him, to 'please others for their good to edification.' Do not think any act of self-denying love unimportant. Keep yourselves in the background. Give up, now and then, at least, your private fancies and likings. To resign a favourite chair, to yield to another the warmest corner by the fire, to deny oneself in favour of another some tempting dish, to go and visit a poor invalid when a pleasant country walk invites, to try and make a deaf person hear, to bear patiently and lovingly with the restlessness of little children; these may seem very trifling things, but it is just by such that hearts are won, religion commended, and so God honoured.

Yet once more. I have endeavoured to caution you against mistaking mere re-

ligious sentiment for true spiritual religion. But do not let me be in any way misunderstood. I do not in the least undervalue warm emotions and loving recollections of the Christian home of early days. Far otherwise. In the case of many a poor wanderer (as in that of the prodigal in our Lord's most perfect parable), the memory of the peace, and order, and love of the long-left home, has led, through God's mercy, to the first movement of repentance. Cherish, then, and keep alive to the utmost each softening thought of the past. The world, and time, and care, will blunt your feelings only too soon. Call back, as far as may be, the fresh and tender affections of childhood and youth. Think of verses, hymns, and prayers, taught with such pains and care by a mother gone, perhaps, to her rest; of the seat by her side in the house of God; of the great Bible opened day by day for family prayer; of the

happy Sunday evenings and the garden walk in summer twilight, when loving interchanges of family affection seemed sanctified by the blessed prospect of one common home in heaven; of the Bible pictures and stories which filled your young minds with astonishment and delight; of the careful packings-up when you went off to school; of the nursings in illness—perhaps of griefs shared in common as you stood around a father's, or a mother's, or a young brother's or sister's grave; of the hopes, and fears, and joys which filled your parents' hearts as they watched your progress amidst the ups and downs of your opening life. Try to be in heart and feeling children once more. Only let not such thoughts and recollections evaporate in mere sentiment. Let them drive you to your knees for pardon, and send you forth strong for present duty and acts of self-denial. Let them fill you with

a holy resolution to walk in the way which your parents have trodden, or are treading, before you.

Finally, my dear brothers and sisters, partakers with me of blessed privileges, subjects like me of many fervent prayers, why, oh why, should any of you fail to reach the blessed home whither your parents have arrived, or are journeying? Why should 'one be taken and another left?' Why should an impassable gulf separate at last those who have lived together here, who have sat at one table, listened to one Book, knelt in prayer to one common Lord? I do not say, for I do not think, that the loss of a child shall mar hereafter a Christian father's joy, that to miss a well-known and well-loved face shall cause in heaven one tear to dim a mother's eye. I cannot tell how, but I am sure that God will abundantly compensate for every loss, and prevent every

heart-ache, and wipe away every tear. But for yourselves, oh think what it would be to know your parents safe and happy for ever, and yourselves lost; to feel that all they said, and did, and taught, and suffered on your behalf, has been all in vain; that you are torn from them for ever; that their happy life must go on evermore independently of you, and that you lose not them only, but with them God, and happiness, and glory!

Perhaps they are still spared to you, and you still have the privilege of witnessing their good example, listening to their teaching, worshipping with them in the house of God. May I say, make much of them; be tender-hearted, loving, and respectful in all your behaviour towards them. Do not wound and pain them by hasty speeches and angry tempers. Do not lay up thorns for your manhood and old age in the recollection of sharp words

spoken, and want of consideration shown towards those who have loved you best, and have done most for you. Oh, how many a son or daughter would give almost anything to have a father or mother now taken away back again only for one hour, that they might, if possible, pluck out the 'arrows, even bitter words,' with which they pierced a loving heart! A parent deeply wounded and disappointed, may, on a dying bed, extend to a thoughtless son full and free forgiveness, and he, through grace, may seek and obtain pardon from his Father in heaven; but he will find it hard, perhaps impossible, ever to forgive himself, and will probably carry with him to his dying day the humbling thought, 'I might have made my parents happy, but too often, by my cruel speeches and heartless selfishness, I made them sad.' But if thus I would earnestly counsel

you to prize most highly the blessing of godly parents, to be courteous, kind, loving, and dutiful, in your conduct towards them; above all, 'fulfil ye their joy' in walking with them in the way of life, choosing, like them, that good part, which shall never be taken from you. I urge you to no course of gloomy restraint and melancholy asceticism. Far from it. God would have all His children to be happy. 'He is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.' The world which He has framed, and given to us to inhabit, is very beautiful, and very full of happiness. And Christians ought to be bright, and happy, and cheerful, and light-hearted. It lightens many a care, but it lessens no true pleasure to serve the Lord Christ. So, then, never let Satan persuade you to credit the wretched lie that religion is all gloom. Your parents

have found the ways of God to be ways of pleasantness and paths of peace, and why should not you ? Those can afford to smile, and wear a bright, unclouded brow, who know that all things shall be made to work for their good, and that death, when it comes, shall prove to be without a sting.

But perhaps your parents have been taken from you. Perhaps you have stood by the grave of one, or both, with the fullest possible conviction that they had gone to be with Christ for ever. If so, they wait and watch for you. They have not yet entered into their full blessedness. This is reserved for the morning of the resurrection ; but is it too much to think that when that glorious morning dawns, and they have awoke in the likeness of their Saviour, and are for ever satisfied, after one adoring look at Him who shall

be the object of attraction to unnumbered eyes; they will look around for you, their earthly charge, hoping to be able to say, as the joy that crowns a thousand blessings, 'Behold us, and the children whom Thou hast given us?'

A PORTRAIT.*

(IN MEMORIAM PATRIS DILECTISSIMI.)

GOD gave him not the gifts that make men great,
Where lawyers plead, and senators debate;
Yet said he not, 'To me, so slow of speech,
It is not granted old or young to teach;
Nor holy hands imposed a charge have given
To plead with men as messenger from Heaven,
And with persuasive words men's hearts inflame
With zeal for my Redeemer's cause and name.'
Musing upon the love which knows no bound—
That love by which himself was sought and found;

* I have added the following poems, taken from a little book published some years back and not now on sale, partly because they seem in some measure to follow up much that has been said before, and may perhaps help to deepen a little impressions already made, and partly because I wish to offer this trifling tribute of reverential affection to the memory of such parents as I venture to think not many have been blest with.

On all that man by sin's defilement lost,
And all his guilty soul's redemption cost,—
The fire was kindled ; and he bade us spread
God's book of life amongst the lost, the dead,
And told how darkened pagans bow the knee
To stocks, and stones, and works of devilry.
It was not eloquence ; but whilst we heard,
By more than eloquence our hearts were stirred.
Heart spoke to heart ; he pleaded as he felt :
Hence words with such strange power to move
and melt.
Around the household altar, day by day
His household calling, he would kneel and pray,
In words so simple, yet so full of faith,
And hope, and love, they seemed the heart's own
breath
Rising from one who communed with his Lord,
In calm reliance on His promised word.
Thus of his house the priest : as king, his sway
How mild, his laws how easy to obey !
Smoothly the wheels of life appeared to move,
Whilst in his little realm he ruled by love.
Always the same—tender, and just, and true—
Implicit trust his children towards him drew,
As one who wisely knew and loved to blend

The father with the sympathizing friend.
And they who served him saw no weak caprice
Selfishly slighting each attempt to please,
But kind consideration, slow to blame,
And justice prompt to satisfy each claim,
And gentle patience, as of one whose eye
By faith *his* Master saw above the sky.
With smiles their willing service he approved;
And they not only honoured him, but loved.
Large stores of wealth he had not, but he thought
Such as he had was God's, and thankful brought
To God his offerings; this his care alone—
No right hand's work should by the left be known.
Nor did he deem that by one offering given
He stood absolved of further debt to Heaven.
He rested not well pleased with duty done,
But seemed to think his labours but begun;
Seeking no praise from men—intent to win,
If God so blessed him, souls from death and sin.
So in a hundred channels far and wide
Flowed of his love and toil the fruitful tide.
He reared the school; the Sunday class he taught
With patient pains; his ready help he brought
To all who, knit in godly brotherhood,
Aimed at God's glory through His creatures' good.

The village clock, which from the old church tower
Speaks of its giver as it chimes the hour;
The village library, with wholesome lore,
Suited for old and young, in plenteous store;
The village club, by which, with prudent care,
The sound for days of sickness might prepare;
The cottage garden, 'neath his fostering eye,
Furnished and tilled with skilful industry;—
These all his bounty told, and proved how vain
Their false and heartless sneer who dare complain—
'These Christians, who would have the Bible spead,
Would seem in sober fact to think it bread:
Caring for part, they overlook the whole,
And starve the body whilst they feed the soul.'
Thus, free from ostentation as from strife,
Ran the calm current of his useful life,
Like some fair river, which with fresher green
Marks where it flows rich fields and groves between.
He seemed from day to day to live and move
In some pure atmosphere of peace and love—
The peace of one who, let what will befal,

Beheld Eternal Wisdom guiding all;
The love which, sprung from Heaven, to Heaven updrew
The warm affections; then, like grateful dew
Falling where'er a thirsty heart was found,
Diffused its fertilising influence round;
A tender, self-renouncing gentleness,
Which feared to wound, and sought unmarked to bless—
A graceful courtesy—a thoughtful care
Loads not his own to lighten and to share—
A mind from petty aims and envy free,
And filled with deep, unfeigned humility;—
Such virtues, not the native growth of earth,
Adorned his life, and spoke his heavenly birth.
God gave him length of days, and age so bright,
At closing eventide it still was light;
Nor failing strength was suffered to alloy
With fears and questionings, his peace and joy.
Still on God's works he thankful gazed around;
Still in God's word his wonted pleasure found;
Nor long before he went to see his Lord
Took his memorials at His holy board.
Then, as he stood like corn whose ripened ear
Awaits the sickle, death drew softly near.

Gently and painlessly the summons came
Which said, 'Depart.' Awhile life's feeble flame
Flickered within the socket. Who shall say,
As his closed eyes we watched from day to day,
And heaving breast, what visions bright and fair
Passed o'er his spirit as he lingered there
On Jordan's brink? what gleams of coming bliss
He caught? what sounds of Heaven's sweet harmonies?
His end was peace—his memory is blest.
For such a treasure, and so long possest,
Our thanks we raise; and since to us is given
In that dear saint removed fresh links with Heaven,
O may we tread in faith the path he trod
Who walked below, and rests above, with God!

MY MOTHER'S BIBLE.

Oft amidst relics of the past is seen
A sword, whose edge erewhile was smooth and keen,
But after long disuse the marks remain
Of many a blow and many a bloody stain;
And 'This,' men say, 'in camp and hard-fought field
A warrior known to fame was wont to wield:
Well may ye mark those jagged clefts, that tell
How 'neath his puissant stroke his foemen fell.'
Thus, little unpretending book, in thee
A sword well used in bygone days I see—
A blade of heavenly temper, proved in fight
Of power to put unearthly foes to flight—
A precious relic, bearing on each page
Marks of such strife as Christian warriors wage.
Here, faith's support, some blessed promise shines,

Scored for its sweetness with emphatic lines;
There, marked for memory's aid, some precept stands,
In love received from Him whose love commands;
Here, clearly writ, and neatly ranged around
Some pregnant passage, answering texts are found,
Within the margin's narrow compass traced
Like some fair star with moons attendant graced;
There, starts from out the page some precious word,
Some title of a loved though absent Lord,
Like costliest spikenard, able to impart
Fragrant refreshment to the fainting heart.
How dear to thee, my mother, was the law
From which 'twas thy delight and wont to draw
Counsels from Heaven, whispered fresh and clear,
As though an angel breathed them in thine ear—
Words which, the heart affecting through the eye,
Lifted thy hopes to thy bright home on high!
In many a calm and meditative hour,
When earthly cares and trifles lost their power
To vex or please, and all the soul was given

To holy thoughts and communings with Heaven,
On Inspiration's record thou wouldst pore
As misers count their hoarded treasures o'er,
Until the page before thine eyesight spread
Seemed from the mind almost in substance fled.
Enough that thou couldst say, 'Howe'er the word
Reach me, be still, my soul, it is the Lord!
That quick and powerful sword that probes the heart,
Only by Him directed does its part;
Those streams of comfort which this book supplies
Only from Him, "the God of comfort," rise.'
Years fraught with change have flitted swiftly by
Since last these sacred pages caught thine eye,
And thou in Heaven hast by experience proved
How true the words on earth so dearly loved.
Full well I know, couldst thou to us reveal
What 'spirits of the just made perfect' feel,
Thou wouldst avow no promise written here,
Thy fears to banish, and thy soul to cheer,
Which has not to its uttermost extent
Found in a world of light accomplishment;
And own the book, where thou didst love to read
Words meet for human ignorance and need,

Gave but faint shadowings of approaching bliss,
Painting that world by symbols drawn from this;
For eye hath never seen, nor ear hath caught,
Nor heart conceived in loftiest flights of thought,
All that to ransomed saints, to thee, is given,
Freely, eternally, to taste in Heaven.

My mother, when I read each gracious word
Sent to the seed of them that love the Lord,
And see thy marks against each verse impressed
Which speaks the offspring of the righteous blest,
Can I forget how daily thou didst plead
On our behalf? how fondly intercede?
Crying, 'For those I love, for those I bore,
Lord, let them live—live with Thee evermore!'
Long since has ceased thy need to watch and pray;
Praise, only praise, employs the eternal day:
But like an answering echo's faint reply,
Heard when the sounds which first awoke it die,
We seem in thought to catch thy prayer again,
And to thy pleadings add a warm 'Amen.'

For her who owned thee once thy task is o'er,
Dear book; she needs thy guidance now no more.

The pilgrim needs no staff, his journey done—
The mariner no chart, the haven won;
They walk no more by faith who joy in sight,
Nor need the day-star with the Sun for light.
For us, as yet we have not reached our rest—
The land of promise yet is unpossest.
Happy if by this sacred pillar led
To Canaan's land our desert path we tread—
To find when, Jordan past, we cease to roam,
Lost ones regained in one eternal home!

A MOTHER'S GRAVE.

NOT to the cold, dark charnel should be given
The sacred relics of the heirs of Heaven;
No mildewed walls, with damp, unwholesome
gloom,
Should cast oppressive shadows o'er their tomb.

Beneath the beaming sun and bright blue sky
All that is left on earth of such should lie,
And daisied turf and blushing roses spread
Beauty and fragrance round their narrow bed.

Fair tree, whose feathery sprays so lightly wave
In rich festoons above a mother's grave—
Sad, yet admiring, I have marked thee grow,
Sweet emblem of her state who sleeps below!

Cypress and yew are round thee, dark and tall,
But thou in stately height outstripp'st them all,
As though, with graceful foliage spreading wide,
All the grave's dreariness thou fain wouldst hide.

For scarce confined within the palisade
Whose cold enclosure guards the sacred dead,
The swelling mound and monumental stone
Thou hast with rich luxuriance o'ergrown.

Fitter memorial, thou, of hallowed dust
Than 'storied urn or animated bust:'
Time, that e'en marble wastes with slow decay,
Adds to thy grace and stature day by day!

And thou, O happy spirit, who hast left
Our hearts of all thy care and love bereft,
How does that cedar which o'erhangs thy clay
Picture thy bliss in yon bright realms of day?

Thou wast a plant of more than mortal birth,
E'en when it seemed thy fibres clung to earth;
Yet blasts of trial, withering frosts of care,
Oft bowed thy stem, or left thy branches bare.

Now like a stately palm-tree dost thou grow
Where storms are hushed and living waters flow;
Like Lebanon's tall cedars spread abroad
Thy branches in the Paradise of God.

How deep thy peace, how infinite thy joy!
No griefs oppress thee, and no cares annoy:
The doubts, and sins, and fears which vex our breast
Break not the calm of thine eternal rest.

Thy work is done, but not the less remains
Bright evidence of all thy love and pains:
We miss thy voice, yet hast thou left behind
Thine impress stamped on many a grateful mind.

Thou wast, too, like the husbandman who sows
His grain in hope, nor tarries till it grows;
But ere a harvest crop rewards his toil,
Lies low himself entombed beneath the soil.

So didst thou sow the seeds of many a prayer,
And many a lesson taught with anxious care:
The fruits are ours now thou art far away—
The answer given when thou hast ceased to pray.

And 'tis enough. 'Twere wrong to wish thee back,
To measure once again thy pilgrim track:
We could not ask for us that pain or smart
Should vex and wound again thy loving heart.

But whilst we know thee in that world of bliss,
We'll think of what thou wouldst have done in
this;
Picture what thou, if here, wouldst have us do;
Recall thy counsels, and thy life review.

It may be, that to such as thee in Heaven
Glimpses of dear ones yet on earth are given;
It may be, that unseen thou hoverest nigh
Oft when we breathe a prayer, or heave a sigh.

We know not; nor would weakly, vainly try
To search into thy being's mystery;
Nor whilst we own an Advocate divine,
Need we a mediation dear as thine.

Fit is thy resting-place. There rise around
Bright, breezy hills, with turf and wild thyme
crowned;
Beneath, the fruitful plain spreads out to view
In long-drawn lines of distant deep'ning blue.

At hand a noble temple rears on high
Its pile of rich and fretted masonry;
And week by week within its sacred walls
The gospel's voice in welcome echoes falls.

Sweet, solemn spot! All breathes of comfort here,
And thoughts of peace and hope should staunch the tear.
Dear sainted spirit, be our lives like thine—
Our hearts as filled with light and love divine;

Then, though our earthly resting-place may be
Far distant from these balmy hills and thee,
Our spirits, freed from cumbrous loads of clay,
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